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# Police Screening Patterns in Five Western Canadian Cities: Looking at Data a Different Way

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DISCUSSION PAPER 20

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines police statistics on B&Es and theft in 5 Western Canadian cities. The primary concern is on the interpretation of data dealing with juveniles and the impact of the Young Offenders Act (YOA). The conventional way of using such data is to assume that police and prosecutor behaviour is a constant and that any changes in statistics reflect changes in the underlying behaviour of juveniles. While we know such an assumption is false, we have only begun to use these data as a useful measure of system dynamics. This paper argues that focusing on local information permits a more intelligent interpretation of these data. Attempts to combine local data at the provincial level, for example, usually obscures interesting differences among cities. However, using local data to speculate on local strategies could improve the data as the consequences of various data gathering procedures are better understood.

While much of the interpretation in this paper is speculative, it seems that the five largest police forces in Alberta and British Columbia responded to the YOA in very different ways.

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## The Importance of Understanding Screening Patterns in Police Departments

The communities of Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Victoria, and Burnaby are the five largest in Alberta and British Columbia. Their police forces include large city forces, such as Vancouver, Calgary, and Edmonton, a large RCMP detachment (Burnaby), and a collection of 6 distinct police departments that police the Victoria metropolitan area. They share a variety of similarities and differences. This paper attempts to compare police activities in these cities with a particular focus on the way cases are screened out of the system. We examine data on adults separately, because different factors may be operating. Our primary concern is with the screening of juveniles, because police behaviour in this area may be particularly important to the delivery of services to young people in trouble. Understanding the dynamics of the screening process may also help us to make better use of official statistics. First, screening minor cases before they are officially recorded has an obvious impact on crime rates. Second, the screening of juveniles may be an indicator of various strategies that are used in dealing with young people.

At the present time official statistics are frequently presented to the public with the assumption that they are generated in a uniform manner by each police force. The police and criminologists know this assumption is false, but as yet it is not clear if these statistics could provide useful insights into police behaviour. Our goal is to see if we can use these data as clues to screening strategies for adult cases and informal diversion for juvenile cases. The work presented here reflects a definitive bias regarding screening, particularly of juvenile cases. We suspect that the official processing of many minor cases is an inefficient use of the criminal justice system. Furthermore, we feel that juveniles are less likely to be labelled as criminals and more likely to be helped if other resources can be utilized more frequently. Thus, a longer range goal is to better understand some of the mechanisms used which might allow juveniles to avoid involvement in later steps of the juvenile justice system. However, before we can understand the police response to juveniles, we need to look at the processing of adult offenders as well. Do the police have strategies that influence both adult and juvenile screening, or do they have different strategies for adults and juveniles? Before we can use official statistics to look into these questions, we need to be aware of specific problems in the interpretation of such data. One of the first questions we might ask is: are there any systematic East–West differences? We are going to focus on five Western Canadian cities, but are these cities typical of all Canadian cities? In general, the cities of British Columbia and Alberta have higher crime rates than Eastern

cities. Should we accept this as an indicator of real crime? Or should we ask if police practices influence these data?

**Police Generated vs. Victimization Data**

It is difficult to find data which would permit true comparisons of crime from city to city. Victimization surveys may be one way of estimating crime rates that are independent of police department strategies (Solicitor General of Canada, 1984). Table 1 provides information on break and enter offenses for seven Canadian cities. We do not have such information on all 5 Western cities which are the topic of this paper, but by comparing Vancouver and Edmonton with Eastern cities we may gain some insights.

If we look at Table 1, column 1 we see the official B&E rates for 1986 for Vancouver, Edmonton, Winnipeg, and four Eastern cities. Each year when such statistics are released the news media asks why some of these Western cities have such high rates. Typically, Vancouver tends to show the highest B&E rates in the nation. But data from the United States suggests that the largest cities usually have the highest crime rates. Thus, the low rates for Toronto are somewhat surprising (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 1988b). One of the ways to check on the meaning of official rates is to do victimization studies of these same cities. From the 1981 victimization survey the estimated occurence of break and enter per 1,000 households was calculated as shown in column 2 of Table 1. As one can see, Montreal now ranks higher than Vancouver followed by Winnipeg and Edmonton. Should we treat the victimization measure as the better measure of actual break and entry occurrences? If we are willing to make such an assumption, we could then calculate a ratio between column 1 and column 2. Thus, a high ratio would indicate that the police may report a higher percentage of B&E's that come to their attention. There is the possibility that victims report B&Es in a different manner in various cities, but the victimization study did not find major differences (Solicitor General of Canada, 1984: p. 5). The percentage of B&Es reported ranged from 61 to 68%.

If one compares column 1 and 2 of Table 1, the B&E picture is somewhat different. The western cities are high on both measures, but the difference is not as large when victimization is used. In column 3 the 31.9 ratio for Vancouver and the 14.9 ratio for Toronto suggests that the two cities use different practices. One interpretation is that the police in cities like Vancouver, and Edmonton with its ratio of 25.7, record a higher percentage of B&Es than Toronto and Montreal. This would produce higher apparent crime rates in the two Western cities. On the other hand, the lower ratios might also suggest that

TABLE 1

Break and Enter Offences Known and Break and Enter Victimizations

| | B&E's known 1986* (rates/100,000) | B & E Victimizations 1981** (rates/1,000) | Ratio Col.1/Col.2 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Vancouver | 3218 | 101 | 31.9 |
| Edmonton | 2208 | 86 | 25.7 |
| Winnipeg | 2331 | 99 | 23.5 |
| Toronto | 1031 | 69 | 14.9 |
| Montreal | 2253 | 122 | 18.5 |
| Halifax/ Dartmouth | 1763 | 79 | 22.3 |
| St. John's | 874 | 54 | 16.2 |

Sources: * Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 1988a.
** Canadian Victimization Survey Bulletin, No. 7, 1986.

Toronto and Montreal have developed better procedures for screening minor cases out of the system.

When we look at these ratios and also look at the percentage of cases cleared by charge, we can make further inferences about police department strategies. In 1984 and 1985 we saw that Vancouver cleared 9% and 12% of its B&Es by charge (Statistics Canada, 1986b). Low charge rates also characterized Burnaby and Victoria. By contrast Toronto cleared 37% and 39% of its B&E cases by charge in 1984 and 1985. The Peel police force, on the suburbs of Toronto, showed an amazing 58% cleared by charge in each of those 2 years. When one thinks about the potential for laying a charge for a B&E, it is obvious that one must have a suspect. In the majority of B&E's, no suspect is known and therefore it is unlikely that a charge can be laid.

The differences between Toronto and Vancouver are hard to explain, but if Toronto has already screened out a portion of the B&E cases before they enter the official records, it is quite possible that those which are recorded include those which have suspects and would increase the likelihood that a charge could be laid. In the case of the Peel Police Force, however, this explanation would not be adequate to explain a 58% charge rate.

One might conclude that Vancouver and Edmonton crime rates could be exaggerated somewhat by reporting practices as suggested by the victimization study. The next stage of the processing of cases, the laying of charges, could easily be influenced by the reporting practices. If many cases have been recorded, more minor cases would be included; thus, fewer cases will lead to charges. On the other hand, if some of the cases which are unlikely to lead anywhere have been screened, the remainder offer a better potential for action. Thus, with more initial screening, a higher charge rate is more likely. Obviously, there are other dynamics influencing these rates, but let us return to the Western cities and pursue this line of thinking. We focus first on Edmonton and Calgary.

**Edmonton and Calgary: Why the Differing Statistics?**

Although we do not have victimization rates for Calgary, comparing the official B&E rates for Edmonton and Calgary can lead to similar types of interpretations. In 1986 the official B&E rate for Edmonton was 2,208 while in Calgary it was 1,233 (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 1988). This pattern of a higher B&E rate in Edmonton than Calgary has been fairly stable for a number of years. In 1984 and 1985 the charge rate for B&Es in Calgary

was 26% and 28% (Statistics Canada, 1986a). For Edmonton the charge rate was 12 percent for those years. Both cities are very similar in demographic and economic characteristics (Silverman, 1977), and thus we would not anticipate great disparities in crime rates. Differences in police strategies, however, vary considerably from city to city. While it is difficult to provide firm evidence, it is reasonable to suggest that Edmonton records a higher proportion of B&E's than Calgary.

Calgary also uses a system developed at Stanford University for deciding whether or not a B&E offense should be pursued based upon characteristics that would predict the likelihood of a successful outcome (Chappell and Moore, 1982). The Burglary Investigation Screening Model (BISM) used by the Calgary police has proved to be accurate in predicting the success or failure of an investigation 85% of the time. Thus, Calgary may fail to record B&Es that have little likelihood of being charged using the screening model and thereby charge a higher percentage of those cases which are recorded. Although we cannot demonstrate that the BISM effects official charge rates for B&Es, if policemen have this system in mind when they are gathering information, it could lead to the non-recording of those cases where there is little likelihood of success.

A systematic study of police recording strategies in Calgary and Edmonton pointed only to different procedures in terms of assaults (Silverman, 1977), but conversations with police in the two cities suggest a general pattern of more inclusive reporting in Edmonton and more selective reporting in Calgary. Given the socio-economic and demographic similarity of the two cities, it is reasonable to suggest that the differences in crime rates reported by the two cities are exaggerated somewhat by reporting practices.

**Estimating Biases in Official Statistics**

In an earlier paper, we argued that it was dangerous to take total violent offenses or total property offenses as useful indicators of crime in a given area (Hackler and Don, 1987). We argued that minor assaults overwhelmed the violent crime data just as theft under $200.00 tended to have an undue influence on total property crime rates. For example, when we looked at total violent crime rates, Quebec appeared to have a relatively low rate. Since minor assaults make up the majority of the violent crime cases, a tendency to screen out minor cases would reduce the total violent crime rate. This pattern seems to fit Quebec.

On the other hand, robbery was more serious and could not be screened as easily. Therefore, dividing the more screenable crime (assault) by the less screenable one (robbery) provided a "recording index." This "recording index" was used to "adjust" the total crime rates. After this adjustment Quebec ranked much higher in violent crime.

We would like to emphasize that this paper is not critical of police forces that screen out minor offenses, particularly property offenses. In fact, it may reflect an intelligent use of police resources if such screening were increased in Canada. However, it is important to realize that these different screening practices will have an impact on official crime rates.

*Sentencing patterns for break and enter*

This paper does not deal with sentencing *per se*, but some of the data on sentencing may provide clues to the charging practices of the police and strategies used by prosecutors. If we look at a Department of Justice study of B&E offenders who were sentenced to prison (Hann and Kopelman, 1987a:10), we see different patterns in the various provinces (Hann and Kopelman, 1987a:10). Of those sentenced for B&E convictions in Alberta in 1984–85, 92% were convicted for single offenses. By contrast only 30% of the Ontario B&E offenders were sentenced on single convictions. In other words, one might assume that multiple charges were laid against the Ontario offenders and they were found guilty of multiple offenses. In Alberta, the tendency seems to be to simply make one charge stick. There is no particular evidence of other great differences between the offenders in the two provinces. In Alberta 81% were under 24, in Ontario 79%. In Alberta 26% were Natives while only 9% were Natives in Ontario. (However, the percentage of Natives differ in the two provinces.) In Alberta 25% had no prior admissions and in Ontario 22% had no prior admissions. In other words, about 75% of both samples had been in jail before.

One might ask if there were differences between the 881 offenders in Alberta with single convictions and the 80 who received multiple convictions (Hann and Kopelman, 1987a: 17). The median sentence for both categories was 6 months. In Ontario the 1,031 cases with a single conviction received shorter median sentences than the 2,429 receiving multiple convictions. In other words, it appears that the police laid more charges against the more serious offenders in Ontario. It is also possible that they had screened out minor offenders, giving them their lower recorded crime rates but leaving more serious cases at the sentencing stage. Of course different factors can influence recording, clearance

rates, charges laid, convictions, and sentencing. While data at various stages permits guessing, such guesses could easily be erroneous.

In Alberta, while past records and other factors certainly influenced the length of sentence, the strategy did not seem to involve efforts to achieve multiple convictions. A tendency to use multiple charges would be compatible with a higher rate of recorded crimes "cleared by charge." Can we make the reverse assumption? Do police forces with high clearance rates use multiple charges more often? Although we cannot be sure, the similarity in the appearance of low clearance rates in Edmonton and Vancouver may be a factor of using single charges.

So far we have been making East-West comparisons. The data are only suggestive, but compared to other parts of Canada it seems that Vancouver and Edmonton record a fairly high percentage of offenses that come to their attention. Calgary does this somewhat less, but still more than some Ontario jurisdictions. This sets the stage for examining the next step, charging juveniles. Our focus will now be limited to the 5 Western cities.

**Charging Juveniles in Five Western Cities for Break and Enter**

*Trends for break and enter in Edmonton and Calgary*

In Table 2A we look at some data from Calgary and Edmonton. Let us first focus on Calgary and Edmonton for 1982, 1983, and 1984 to see if the introduction of the Young Offenders Act in 1984 had any impact on police practices. Columns 1 and 2 of Table 2A show the traditional difference between Calgary and Edmonton. Edmonton has more B&Es and higher rates. As we argued before, this may be partially due to more complete recording in Edmonton. Note that the rate dropped between 1982 and 1985 but went up in 1986 and 1987 in both cities.

When we look at column 3, the percentage of B&Es cleared by charge, we see that Calgary clears a somewhat higher percentage than Edmonton. That fits with our previous discussion; that is, if Calgary has screened out more non-serious cases, the remaining pool of offenses would be more likely to yield charges.

In column 4 we look at the charge rate. That is, we look at the *charges* per 100,000 instead of the *offenses*. Although the charge rates in column 4 are higher for Edmonton than for Calgary, the differences are not as great as the

TABLE 2A

Break and Enter Rates for Adults and Juveniles for 1982-87
(rates per 100,000) Calgary and Edmonton

| City and Population | Year | Actual No. B&E's Known (1) | Rate of B&E's Known (2) | % B&E's Cleared by Charge (3) | Charge Rate* (4) | Rate of Boys Charged** (5) | Rate of Girls Charged (6) | Rate of Juv. not Charged (7) | % not Charged (8) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Calgary | 82 | 10,126 | 1,688 | 14 | 237 | 88 | 7 | 57 | 38 |
| (600,000) | 83 | 8,784 | 1,464 | 17 | 246 | 91 | 5 | 42 | 31 |
| | 84 | 6,779 | 1,130 | 16 | 113 | 80 | 3 | 40 | 32 |
| | 85 | 6,565 | 1,059 | 17 | 184 | 72 | 4 | 60 | 44 |
| | 86 | 7,707 | 1,123 | 14 | 184 | 66 | 3 | 49 | 41 |
| | 87 | 9,313 | 1,454 | 12 | 191 | 77 | 3 | 64 | 45 |
| Edmonton | 82 | 13,035 | 2,370 | 11 | 251 | 31 | 1 | 23 | 42 |
| (550,000) | 83 | 12,590 | 2,289 | 11 | 262 | 29 | 2 | 24 | 43 |
| | 84 | 10,407 | 1,892 | 10 | 195 | 38 | 2 | 6 | 12 |
| | 85 | 10,241 | 1,813 | 11 | 210 | 38 | 3 | 4 | 8 |
| | 86 | 12,592 | 2,208 | 10 | 231 | 43 | 3 | 8 | 15 |
| | 87 | 13,897 | 2,432 | 9 | 231 | 39 | 5 | 7 | 14 |

* Number of charges for adults and juveniles per 100,000 people
** Number of charges for boys per 100,000 people

rate of B&Es (column 2). Normally, we think of the offenses known as our best indicator of crime, but it is possible that the charge rates are better for comparing Edmonton and Calgary.

Unfortunately, high clearance rates have sometimes been viewed as a measure of efficiency (Skolnick, 1966: Ch. 8). In the U. S. this has led police forces to manipulate clearance rates in order to exaggerate their efficiency. In some situations detectives have persuaded offenders to plead guilty to additional offenses, which they have not committed, in exchange for certain considerations. This enables the police to clear more charges. The police have then been able to negotiate with the prosecutor or judge to only sentence the offender for one offence (Skolnick, 1966: p. 175).

As far as we can tell, Edmonton has not attempted to manipulate its clearance rate to compare with Calgary, and the consistency of these rates has the potential of enabling us to understand different procedures in various police departments. If the police resist manipulating things like clearance rates, then deliberate changes in screening practices should be reflected in measures such as clearance rates.

In columns 5 and 6 we note that the charge rate for both boys and girls was usually twice as high in Calgary as it was in Edmonton. There is little reason to believe that juveniles in Calgary commit more B&E's than those in Edmonton, but we also know that there has been a systematic difference in police responses to juveniles over the years (Hackler, 1981). Police practice in Calgary has been to send almost all of the juveniles who are arrested on to court. By contrast the Edmonton police have used more discretion in screening out offenders. This is reflected in the data in columns 5 and 6. Thus, while Calgary appears to have a lower overall B&E rate than Edmonton, it appears to have a higher juvenile B&E rate. In fact, we probably have greater similarity in criminal behaviour and differences in screening practices.

Column 7 of Table 2A is more difficult to explain. These are the rates for juveniles "not charged." What is puzzling is that the rate for juveniles "not charged" is higher in Calgary than for Edmonton. If you were to look at column 7 alone, one might conclude that Calgary screens more B&E cases than Edmonton, even though local knowledge suggests just the opposite. By computing the percentage of juveniles not charged, that is, column 7 divided by the total of columns 5, 6, and 7, we hoped to get a measure of screening, but we could not interpret the meaning of the "not charged" column at this time. Speculation, however, might be useful.

In 1984 the picture changes significantly in Edmonton. The rate of juveniles "not charged" drops to 6 and remains in that range for four years. Calgary, however, maintains a similar pattern for the 6 year period. Our informal knowledge suggests that considerable screening is done in Edmonton which does not lead to a statistic being recorded under "juveniles not charged." We see the same pattern in Vancouver in Table 2B. Therefore, it is difficult and perhaps dangerous to use this category without having considerable local knowledge.

The Young Offenders Act was introduced in 1984 but the age was not raised to 18 until 1985. Did the legislation by itself have an impact? In Edmonton one saw a one-third increase in the number of boys charged from 1983 to 1984 (from 29 to 38) along with a dramatic decrease in juveniles not charged (from 43 to 12). We saw no indication of changes of this nature in 1984 in Calgary.

*Trends for break and enter in Vancouver, Burnaby, and Victoria*

If we turn to Table 2B we have a comparable set of data for the three largest communities in British Columbia: Vancouver, Burnaby, and the Victoria metropolitan area. Some characteristics of Vancouver have already been discussed, but Burnaby and Victoria have other characteristics that should be noted. In terms of police forces, Burnaby represents the second largest community in British Columbia; but should it be viewed as a suburb of Vancouver, or a city of over 100,000 people? Victoria has a population of about 64,000, but the Victoria metropolitan area includes Saanich, Esquimalt, Oak Bay, Colwood, and Sooke (pop. 215,000). Each of these communities in the Victoria region has its own police force and probably has different patterns for handling juveniles. In another paper we suggest that Victoria is an excellent illustration of a "central city" which has more attractive targets than its surrounding suburban areas. As a result, potential offenders may go "downtown" to commit some of their crimes (Hackler and Don, 1989). In our more detailed analysis of the Victoria area, we suggest that the Victoria police are more likely to charge such offenders, possibly because some of them are outsiders, than the surrounding police departments. In Table 2B, the data for the 6 police departments in the Victoria area were pooled together to give a picture for the overall metropolitan area compared to other larger communities.

When we examine the data on Vancouver (Table 2B), columns 1 and 2 show the historically high B&E rates for Vancouver, which we suggest from our previous discussion of victimization rates is partially due to high rates of

TABLE 2B

Break and Enter Rates for Adults and Juveniles for 1982-87
(rates per 100,000) Vancouver, Burnaby, and Victoria Metro

| City and Population | Year | Actual No. B&E's Known (1) | Rate of B&E's Known (2) | % B&E's Cleared by Charge (3) | Charge Rate (4) | Rate of Boys Charged (5) | Rate of Girls Charged (6) | Rate of Juv. not Charged (7) | % not Charged (8) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Vancouver (415,000) | 82 | 13,307 | 3,206 | 9 | 279 | 53 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| | 83 | 13,442 | 3,239 | 6 | 192 | 48 | | 0 | 0 |
| | 84 | 12,593 | 3,034 | 7 | 227 | 49 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| | 85 | 11,582 | 2,787 | 9 | 253 | 72 | 6 | 0 | 0 |
| | 86 | 13,369 | 3,218 | 7 | 214 | 65 | 6 | 40 | 36 |
| | 87 | 13,470 | 3,170 | 6 | 210 | 67 | 2 | 39 | 36 |
| Burnaby (139,000) | 82 | 3,262 | 2,346 | 6 | 140 | 107 | 3 | 4 | 3 |
| | 83 | 3,668 | 2,638 | 5 | 136 | 63 | 11 | 16 | 18 |
| | 84 | 3,321 | 2,389 | 5 | 124 | 63 | 0 | 17 | 21 |
| | 85 | 3,687 | 2,630 | 5 | 143 | 99 | 4 | 19 | 15 |
| | 86 | 4,027 | 2,848 | 6 | 165 | 102 | 4 | 137 | 56 |
| | 87 | 4,624 | 3,187 | 4 | 139 | 66 | 4 | 58 | 45 |
| Victoria* Metro. (215,000) | 82 | 4,071 | 1,893 | NA | NA | 125 | 7 | 73 | 36 |
| | 83 | 4,518 | 2,101 | NA | NA | 118 | 7 | 46 | 27 |
| | 84 | 4,267 | 1,984 | NA | NA | 62 | 7 | 41 | 37 |
| | 85 | 3,770 | 1,828 | 5 | 81 | 63 | 8 | 21 | 23 |
| | 86 | 3,413 | 1,781 | 5 | 83 | 58 | 2 | 20 | 25 |
| | 87 | 3,017 | 1,482 | 9 | 127 | 53 | 4 | 17 | 23 |

* Vict. Metro includes Victoria City Municipal, Saanich Municipal, Esquimalt, Oak Bay, Collwood Prov. Sooke Prov.

recording. Column 3 also shows that the clearance rates for B&E are quite low for all 3 B.C. communities. Does that mean the police are inefficient in laying charges or does it suggest that they record a higher percentage of the cases that come to their attention? The latter seems more likely.

Column 4 contains the charge rate per 100,000 persons. While recorded Vancouver B&E rates are higher than Edmonton, charge rates are similar, and the charge rates for Burnaby and Victoria are somewhat lower. Since Burnaby and Victoria are more suburban in nature, and may in reality have less of a crime problem than Vancouver, these figures seem reasonable.

The charge rates for boys and girls (columns 5 and 6) suggest a pattern somewhat intermediate between those of Calgary and Edmonton. While the Vancouver police charge fewer youths than Calgary, they charge more than Edmonton. A genuinely higher B&E rate in Vancouver may influence this charge rate for juveniles, but police strategies probably influence these rates more than juvenile behaviour.

Interestingly enough, column 7 shows Vancouver with a zero rate of juveniles "not charged" until 1986. Again, local knowledge would suggest a considerable amount of screening done by the Vancouver police, but the "not charged" statistic was not recorded until 1986. After 1986 these data may provide some useful information. In 1984, there is no indication of a dramatic change in the charging of juveniles after the introduction of the Young Offenders Act. The age limit in B. C. was raised from 17 to 18 in 1985, and the rate of boys charged went from 49 to 72 in Vancouver, from 63 to 99 in Burnaby, but showed no change in Victoria. In Edmonton and Calgary, where the change of age from 16 to 18 could easily have led to a doubling of the juveniles charged, we saw no appreciable changes.

When we examine the data for Burnaby, we must also ask if that community is influenced by the "central city phenomenon" because of the possible attractions for crime in Vancouver, just as youth in Saanich might be attracted to downtown Victoria. If so, Burnaby rates would be reduced. The senior author of this paper argues that a community of 139,000 will have many attractive targets for juveniles and that limited mobility would make them more likely to commit property crimes in their community rather than travel the distance to Vancouver. Adult criminals might have a larger "awareness space" and hence might seek more attractive targets in downtown Vancouver (Brantingham and Brantingham, 1981). The junior author of this paper is more inclined to feel that juveniles would find downtown Vancouver a major attraction

for potential property offenders.

In 1982 the Burnaby charge rate for boys was more than twice as high as Vancouver (107 to 53) and, in these official statistics at least, there is not much indication of screening. This rate drops to 63 in 1983 and then rises to 99 in 1985. Of course, in communities of only 100,000, year to year variations in such statistics will be greater than in larger cities.

Total B&E rates for Burnaby are less than Vancouver's in 1982 (2346 compared to 3206) but similar in 1987. If we assume that juvenile behaviour parallels adult behaviour, the higher rate of charging boys in Burnaby reflects a tendency to screen boys less than the Vancouver police, but charge rates can also be influenced by prosecutorial discretion. Changes in prosecutors in Burnaby and Victoria may have a greater impact on charge rates than in Vancouver, where patterns have been more consistent over the same time period.

It is tempting to try to interpret column 7, the rate of juveniles "not charged"; but it makes more sense to give the Burnaby and Vancouver police a chance to compare notes for a few years. The rate of juveniles "not charged" may provide a way of assessing the impact of deliberate policy decisions regarding the screening of juveniles in the future, but as yet we do not have enough local knowledge to make meaningful use of this figure at this time.

When we turn to Victoria, we see that the high B&E rates for the city of Victoria (3166 per 100,000 in 1986, Edmonton Journal, Feb 19, 1988) are different from the larger metropolitan area. In column 2 of Table 2B, the 1986 rate for the Victoria metropolitan area as constructed here is 1781. Thus, we would argue that B&Es in the Victoria metropolitan area are not more frequent than in other Western cities. The reason for such high crime rates for the smaller city of Victoria (60,000 people) is explained by the "central city phenomenon," the tendency for potential criminals from suburbia to seek targets in the downtown area (Hackler and Don, 1989).

In columns 5 and 6 of Table 2B we see high rates of charges for boys and girls in Victoria in 1982 and 1983 (125 and 117). Surprisingly, there is also a fairly high rate for juveniles not charged in column 7 (73 and 46). Actually, the data we are using for Victoria in column 7 is called "informals" rather than "not charged." We are treating the two categories as the same, but we are aware that this could be a mistake. Before we examined these data, we made the assumption that high charge rates for juveniles would be accompanied by relatively low rates for juveniles not charged as well as the reverse. However, in

1982 and 1983, Victoria appeared to do quite a bit of charging as well as handling juveniles informally. As noted earlier, "juveniles not charged" is a statistic that should be viewed as speculation. We mention it here to encourage discussion. For the present, it probably has a variety of meanings.

The charge rate for juveniles in Victoria may reflect the policies of various prosecutors at different times. Upon seeing a dramatic change in charges laid against boys in 1983 and 1984 (a drop from 118 to 62), we should not complain that our statistics are unreliable. Rather, if this supports a deliberate change in prosecutorial policy, then we have *useful* statistics. Similarly, when Victoria has a charge rate higher than Vancouver's, we should not confuse this with the behaviour of juveniles. Local knowledge suggests that Vancouver screened more juveniles from the courts than Victoria in 1982 and 1983. Thus, these data make sense.

*Some criminologists use illustrations of this sort as evidence of poor or useless crime statistics. We disagree. Such data may be good indicators of system behaviour and as such they are valuable. It is the assumption that these data should reflect juvenile behaviour that is in error.*

Can we assess the impact of the Young Offenders Act? In 1984 the law became operative and in 1985 17 year olds were added to the B. C. system. In Alberta 16 and 17 year olds were added to the system. These data do not show any spectacular change in B.C. We should not place any credence on "juveniles not charged" figures in B.C. unitl that category has become more standardized.. In Alberta, bringing in 16 and 17 year-olds should have doubled the rates in 1985, but Calgary's rate went down a little for boys (80 to 72).

So far we have been discussing B&E, a fairly serious crime. Thus, there may be less discretion and local practices would have less impact on screening. Data on B&Es may be a reasonable indicator of actual B&Es, compared to theft which is more easily screened. Let us now turn to theft rates instead of B&E rates. We have argued elsewhere that B&E rates are not as easy to screen from the justice system as thefts (Hackler and Don, 1987). Therefore, one might expect greater variance in screening for theft when changes such as the Young Offenders Act are introduced.

**Theft Rates, Multiple Charges, and Sentencing**

As we turn to theft offenses, we argue that they could be screened from the system more easily at the discretion of the police. Young thieves and first

offenders could be given a second chance more easily than those committing B&Es. When we move from recorded crimes to charges laid, the statistics have different meaning and are influenced by somewhat different factors. An earlier paper focused on how crimes are recorded (Hackler and Don, 1987). This paper concentrates on charging. Thus, if one police force uses multiple charges while a second police department simply concentrates on finding a single charge that will "stick," it would influence data on "thefts cleared by charge." Those laying multiple charges might clear more thefts. Those laying single charges may convict as many offenders but will clear fewer offenses. As in the case of B&Es, information on custodial sentences for theft may provide some insights on charging practices.

*Sentencing patterns for theft*

For those who received custodial sentences for theft under $200 in Alberta, 97 percent received single convictions whereas for Ontario 55 percent were single convictions (Hann and Kopelman, 1987b: Figure 2-1c). In other words, one sees the same pattern as for B&E's in that Alberta produces single convictions while Ontario is more inclined to have multiple convictions. Although it is not obvious from the data, one can probably assume that the custodial sentences for theft under $200 involve repeat offenders rather than first time offenders. In Alberta 49 percent of those receiving custodial sentences were under 24 years of age as compared to 51 percent for Ontario (Hann and Kopelman, 1987b: p. 12). One will recall that the percentage of those under 24 for the B&E's for Alberta and Ontario was 81 percent and 79 percent respectively (Hann and Fogel, 1987: p. 10). The fact that those sentenced for theft under $200 are considerably older than the B&E cases suggests that those who actually get sentenced for theft under $200 are probably older, repeat offenders. Unfortunately, we do not have information on single and multiple convictions for British Columbia, nor do we have information on single and multiple convictions for probation for any of these provinces (Hann, and Kopelman, 1987a, 1987b: p. 25 and p. 43).

While we are fairly comfortable with the assumption that the police in Alberta, or possibly the prosecutors, are content to end up with a single conviction, we are not sure if other charges are dropped along the way. By contrast, there is some indication that more charges are laid and more charges stay with offenders to the conviction stage for Ontario offenders. The data are incomplete, but the lower clearance rate that we see in the police statistics for many Western cities may reflect this tendency to lay a single charge.

**Charging Juveniles in Five Western Cities for Theft**

In 1986 and 1987 theft under $200 was replaced by theft under $1000. At one time bicycles were thought of as part of "petty theft." With rising prices they no longer fit in the under $200 category. Now they are back in with other "petty theft." In columns 1 and 2 of Tables 3A and 3B, the official rates of theft are compatible with previous inferences. Edmonton and the British Columbian cities have rather high rates while Calgary has distinctly lower rates. We suggest this is at least partially due to more complete recording.

*Trends for theft in Edmonton and Calgary*

When we look at column 3 of Table 3A, the higher percentage of thefts cleared by charge in Calgary would be consistent with this argument. Also, if we examine the charge rate for theft in column 4 for Calgary and Edmonton, we see greater similarity than if we use recorded theft rates. Normally, we would use *recorded* crime as the best measure for comparing systems. In the case of Calgary and Edmonton, the *charge* rate might be more appropriate.

If we are interested in the impact of the YOA, we would note any trends in rate of boys charged (column 5) or girls (column 6) in Table 3A. Calgary charges boys for theft at a higher rate (112–161) than Edmonton (28–113). Again, this statistic makes sense when one understands the local policy in Calgary of charging more juveniles. If one interprets these charge rates as behaviour of juveniles, these data do NOT make sense. In 1986 and 1987 the rates go up for boys in Calgary but show little change in Edmonton. In addition, girls are more likely to be charged in Calgary than in Edmonton. The increase in 1986 and 1987 is hard to explain. Were the increasing number of juveniles, because of the inclusion of 16 and 17 year-olds, finally appearing in the system? Or did the change of the petty theft category to include items up to $1000 increase the numbers? By contrast, it is surprising that Edmonton charge rates for theft are so small for juveniles in 1986 and 1987 (column 5 and 6). Were the police in Edmonton finally working through their strategies for utilizing alternative measures? If so, it is possible that instead of "widening the net" the police were successful at screening minor cases from the system.

The impact of the Young Offenders Act is apparent in Edmonton when the rate went up from 40 for boys in 1983 to 113 in 1984 (column 5). A smaller increase appeared in 1984 in the charge rate for boys for B&Es (Table 2A, column 5). Is it possible that the Edmonton police abandoned their screening procedures of minor crime, at least temporarily, while they were adjusting to the

TABLE 3A

Theft Under $200 Rates for Adults and Juveniles for 1982-87
(rates per 100,000) Calgary and Edmonton

| City and Population | Year | Actual No. Thefts Known (1) | Rate of Thefts Known (2) | % Thefts Cleared by Charge (3) | Charge Rate (4) | Rate of Boys Charged (5) | Rate of Girls Charged (6) | Juv. not Charged (7) | % not Charged (8) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Calgary (600,000) | 82 | 15,577 | 2596 | 30 | 767 | 112 | 53 | 41 | 20 |
| | 83 | 14,969 | 2494 | 32 | 796 | 161 | 70 | 45 | 16 |
| | 84 | 12,278 | 2046 | 33 | 676 | 112 | 50 | 50 | 24 |
| | 85 | 12,496 | 2016 | 31 | 655 | 112 | 60 | 45 | 21 |
| | *86 | 20,768* | 3322 | 23 | 790 | 144 | 74 | 46 | 17 |
| | *87 | 25,921* | 4046 | 20 | 865 | 152 | 78 | 56 | 19 |
| Edmonton (550,000) | 82 | 20,347 | 3699 | 20 | 727 | 28 | 12 | 168 | 80 |
| | 83 | 20,687 | 3761 | 22 | 820 | 40 | 12 | 123 | 70 |
| | 84 | 18,381 | 3342 | 27 | 897 | 113 | 63 | 55 | 24 |
| | 85 | 18,340 | 3346 | 24 | 814 | 98 | 46 | 76 | 35 |
| | *86 | 30,562* | 5360 | 16 | 915 | 88 | 36 | 172 | 58 |
| | *87 | 38,820* | 6793 | 14 | 960 | 74 | 36 | 203 | 65 |

* 1986 and 1987 data are for theft under $1000.

YOA? Interestingly enough, when 16 and 17 year olds were added in 1985 the charge rate for theft for boys went down to 98. We see a similar pattern for the girls.

Calgary does not show this response to the YOA. The charge rates for theft remained fairly constant for boys and girls. In fact, the 1983 charge rate for theft of 161 for the boys is higher than either 1984 (112) or 1985, after the older boys were included.

The rate of juveniles "not charged" appears in column 7, and it is very questionable whether or not we can use this column as an indicator of screening practices. It seems to make a certain amount of sense for Calgary and Edmonton, supporting the contention that in 1984 Edmonton police began charging more and screening less (juveniles "not charged" dropped from 123 to 55). In 1986 the Edmonton rate for juveniles "not charged" for theft moved up to 172 and then to 203 in 1987. This could be consistent with a willingness by the Edmonton police to use alternative measures. In Calgary the rates for juveniles "not charged" remained fairly constant and lower than Edmonton. This would be consistent with a greater tendency to charge and a lesser tendency to use alternative measures.

These statistics are consistent with some other facts that we are beginning to appreciate about the way systems adapt to legislation such as the YOA. Each system works out its own strategy. Some make changes, others continue as they have in the past. When a sociologist or statistician tries to make generalizations *without* attempting to understand local circumstances, interpretations can be very risky. Local police units, however, might predict changes in their statistics that would differ remarkably from neighbouring units. Thus, data that look strange to outsiders might be useful tools to local units to see if their policies lead to changes in a predictable manner.

*Trends for theft in Vancouver, Burnaby, and Victoria*

Turning to the three British Columbia cities (Table 3B), we see differences in the impact of the YOA depending on the community. In Vancouver, there is a small decrease in boys charged in 1984(column 5, 62 to 54), but a slight increase in 1985 after 17 year olds were included (54 to 78). The rates for the girls in Vancouver actually drops somewhat from the 1983 level of 47.

TABLE 3B

Theft Under $200 Rates for Adults and Juveniles for 1982-87
(rates per 100,000) Vancouver, Burnaby, and Victoria Metro

| City and Population | Year | Actual No. Thefts Known (1) | Rate of Thefts Known (2) | % Thefts Cleared by Charge (3) | Charge Rate (4) | Rate of Boys Charged (5) | Rate of Girls Charged (6) | Juv. not Charged (7) | % not Charged (8) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Vancouver (415,000) | 82 | 15,959 | 3845 | 22 | 858 | 52 | 32 | 0 | 0 |
| | 83 | 16,226 | 3909 | 23 | 888 | 62 | 47 | 0 | 0 |
| | 84 | 16,347 | 3939 | 20 | 807 | 54 | 35 | 0 | 0 |
| | 85 | 16,753 | 4032 | 20 | 810 | 78 | 38 | 0 | 0 |
| | *86 | 29,941* | 7206 | 12 | 867 | 90 | 43 | 0 | 0 |
| | *87 | 29,237* | 6881 | 12 | 834 | 64 | 26 | 38 | 0 |
| Burnaby (139,000) | 82 | 4,624 | 3326 | 11 | 380 | 42 | 31 | 45 | 38 |
| | 83 | 5,148 | 3703 | 13 | 475 | 59 | 11 | 70 | 50 |
| | 84 | 4,826 | 3471 | 14 | 470 | 65 | 41 | 97 | 48 |
| | 85 | 4,946 | 3528 | 13 | 464 | 82 | 55 | 89 | 39 |
| | *86 | 9,091* | 6429 | 8 | 544 | 108 | 49 | 75 | 32 |
| | *87 | 8,824* | 6081 | 10 | 622 | 158 | 69 | 106 | 32 |
| Victoria Metro. (215,000) | 82 | 8,212 | 3819 | NA | NA | 134 | 79 | 214 | 50 |
| | 83 | 8,788 | 4087 | NA | NA | 105 | 62 | 252 | 60 |
| | 84 | 9,126 | 4244 | NA | NA | 114 | 69 | 205 | 53 |
| | 85 | 7,660 | 3930 | NA | NA | 117 | 114 | 172 | 43 |
| | *86 | 5,885* | 9110 | 14 | 370 | 95 | 70 | 36 | 18 |
| | *87 | 5,545* | 8251 | 15 | 393 | 67 | 60 | 41 | 24 |

* 1986 and 1987 data for theft under $1000.

*Interpreting "juveniles not charged"*

Earlier, we cautiously tried to interpret "juveniles not charged" in Edmonton and Calgary. It would clearly be foolhardy to make an interpretation in B. C. In column 7 of Table 3b we note dramatic differences between the data in Vancouver and Victoria. In Vancouver, we got no official indicator of juveniles screened from the system up until 1985, even though we were convinced that considerable screening was done. In 1986 and 1987 figures appeared showing juveniles "not charged" for theft at the rate of 38 and 30. As the police compare notes with neighbouring jurisdictions, these figures may become useful as a measure of screening.

The pattern for juveniles "not charged" in Burnaby appears reasonable with a third to one-half falling in this category (column 7). However, the figures for Victoria are confusing. As in the case of B&Es, the charge rates for theft AND the rate of juveniles "not charged" are both high. These rates should not be taken at face value since we are using different sources and combining statistics from 6 different police departments. In column 7 we are using a category labelled "informals" for juveniles in Victoria. We believe this category is the same as juveniles "not charged", but we acknowledge the possibility of differences.

When we look at the 3 largest communities in British Columbia, we see vast differences in the rates for juveniles charged and not charged for theft. This should not be cause for panic since administrative practices vary considerably from community to community, especially when it comes to screening minor juvenile offenses such as theft. For example, we have argued elsewhere that the Vancouver system has developed considerable flexibility and ingenuity in dealing with juveniles even though we only recently have official statistics which measures the informal screening (Hackler, forthcoming). Such flexibility and experimentation is important, but they will naturally leave certain types of statistics in chaos temporarily. The key point in this paper is that in the future such data may help to assess the success of some of these experiments.

**Using a Processing Index as an Indicator of Screening**

Tables 2 and 3 do not provide clear indicators of screening practices. Can we create a single measure that would provide a measure of a police department's propensity to screen out minor cases? Can we assume that the police must respond to more serious crime, such as B&E, but have an option when less serious crime, such as theft, is involved? Assuming that it is more

difficult to screen out a B&E than a theft, we can calculate a ratio between the two, which we will call a "processing index." Thus, we assume that charges for B&E are somewhat stable while charges for theft permit more discretion. A low processing index would suggest extensive screening of theft cases.

When we look at Table 4A, the processing index for Calgary and Edmonton varies from year to year. The differences between the two cities are not systematic. Edmonton shows an increase to 4.5 in the processing index in 1984, suggesting that theft cases were screened less with the introduction of the YOA.

Table 4B compares the three B. C. cities and shows that Burnaby tends to have lower processing indices than Vancouver, which is lower than Victoria. The indices for Burnaby in 1982 and 1983 of .7 and .9 show that fewer charges were laid for theft than for B&E. Since we assume that thefts are more common, an index lower than 1 suggests systematic and extensive screening of the less serious theft cases in Burnaby.

If the assumptions behind our argument are valid, the processing index could provide a single measure which might be useful as a measure of police screening. It would be normal if smaller and suburban communities did more screening. More deliberate efforts in larger communities to use alternative measures might be assessed to some degree by using this statistic.

**Speculating on Screening Patterns**

Although the data presented here do not permit conclusions on screening patterns, speculation may offer a basis for discussion. In Table 5 we attempt to classify our 5 Western cities, plus Montreal, in terms of their screening, recording of theft, screening after recording, and then charging. We have some data on recording and charging which allows us to make inferences about secondary screening in column 3.

Montreal is presented as a contrast and is based on interviews with Montreal police personnel. The official data for Montreal, not presented in this paper, are consistent with the pattern in Table 5. Essentially, Montreal police tend to handle most minor theft informally, possibly more than any other part of Canada. This results in relatively few cases appearing in court. Victoria, on the other hand, seems to process more and has high charge rates for boys and girls with many appearing in youth court.

TABLE 4A

Processing Index: Juvenile Charges for Theft Divided by Juvenile Charges for Break and Enter, 1982-87 (rates per 100,000) Calgary and Edmonton

| City | Year | Juvenile Charge rate for theft** | Juvenile Charge rate for B&E's*** | Processing Index (thefts/B&Es) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Calgary | 1982 | 165 | 95 | 1.7 |
| | 1983 | 231 | 96 | 2.4 |
| | 1984 | 162 | 84 | 1.9 |
| | 1985 | 172 | 77 | 2.2 |
| | 1986 | 218* | 70 | 3.1* |
| | 1987 | 230* | 80 | 2.9* |
| Edmonton | 1982 | 40 | 32 | 1.3 |
| | 1983 | 52 | 31 | 1.7 |
| | 1984 | 176 | 39 | 4.5 |
| | 1985 | 143 | 40 | 3.6 |
| | 1986 | 123* | 46 | 2.7* |
| | 1987 | 110* | 44 | 2.5* |

* 1986 and 1987 data are for theft under $1000.
** Combined Col. 5 & 6 - Table 3A
*** Combined Col. 5 & 6 - Table 2A

TABLE 4B

Processing Index: Juvenile Charges for Theft Divided by Juvenile Charges for Break and Enter, 1982-1987 (rates per 100,000) Vancouver, Burnaby, and Victoria Metro

| City | Year | Juvenile Charge rate for theft** | Juvenile Charge rate for B&E's*** | Processing Index (thefts/B&Es) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Vancouver | 1982 | 84 | 57 | 1.5 | |
| | 1983 | 109 | 52 | 2.1 | |
| | 1984 | 89 | 53 | 1.7 | Avg. =1.7 |
| | 1985 | 116 | 78 | 1.5 | |
| | 1986 | 133* | 71 | 1.9 | |
| | 1987 | 90* | 69 | 1.3 | |
| Burnaby | 1982 | 73 | 109 | 0.7 | |
| | 1983 | 70 | 74 | 0.9 | |
| | 1984 | 106 | 63 | 1.7 | Avg. =1.2 |
| | 1985 | 137 | 103 | 1.3 | |
| | 1986 | 157* | 106 | 1.5 | |
| | 1987 | 89* | 70 | 1.3 | |
| Victoria Metro | 1982 | 213 | 132 | 1.6 | |
| | 1983 | 167 | 125 | 1.3 | |
| | 1984 | 183 | 69 | 2.7 | Avg. =2.3 |
| | 1985 | 235 | 75 | 3.1 | |
| | 1986 | 165* | 61 | 2.7 | |
| | 1987 | 127* | 60 | 2.1 | |

* 1986 and 1987 data are for theft under $1000.
** Combined Col. 5 & 6 - Table 3B
*** Combined Col. 5 & 6 - Table 2B

TABLE 5

Possible Patterns for Processing Theft Cases for Juveniles in 6 cities

| | Initial Screening* (1) | Recording* (2) | Secondary Screening (3) | Charging | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Boys (4) | Girls (5) |
| Montreal | Very High | Very Low | High | Low | Low |
| Calgary | Med High | Med | Low | High | High |
| Edmonton | Med Low | High | High | Med | Med |
| Vancouver | Low | High | High | Med | Med |
| Victoria | Low | High | Low | High | High |
| Burnaby | Low | High | Med | Med (82-85)<br>High (86-87) | Med |

* Highly Speculative.

In Table 5 the differences among the 5 Western cities may be exaggerated as well as incorrect. We have no data, for example, on the recording of theft for juveniles as distinct from adults. While we have some reasonable descriptions of practices in Montreal and some guesses about the difference between Calgary and Edmonton, comparing notes among Vancouver, Victoria, and Burnaby is something we hope will be stimulated by this paper. Using recorded thefts for adults, however, we suggest that these latter three cities screen adults and probably youths less at the initial stages. Initial screening could take many forms. No record is one option. The "card file" with no further action is another. Silverman's (1977) study of Calgary and Edmonton suggests that what gets recorded can also differ. We believe Edmonton, Vancouver, Victoria, and Burnaby record more thefts than Calgary, and we are reasonably certain that Montreal records fewer thefts for juveniles. By contrast, this could exaggerate theft rates in B. C. and thus exaggerate property crime rates compared to other parts of the country.

We do not claim that Table 5 is correct, but such a table is worth creating. The point is that understanding the *differences* in system dynamics may be the most profitable way of utilizing juvenile justice statistics at the present time.

**Conclusion**

By focussing on the 5 major juvenile courts in Alberta and British Columbia, we can see that there is a great deal of variety. While these data may be of use to the people working in the 5 systems reviewed, it is presumptious for an outsider to make strong inferences. In this paper we make many assumptions which may be wrong. However, attempts to appreciate the diversity in these 5 systems may lead many local systems to compare notes. They all deal with similar problems, and the sharing of this knowledge may be productive.

With the exception of Edmonton, in the case of thefts in 1984 and 1985, we do not see a dramatic change in police behaviour with the introduction of the Young Offenders Act. Instead, patterns of police behaviour seem to change gradually, adapting to the YOA, but also adapting the legislation to local police strategies. The future data from Edmonton, for example, could easily show a return to more screening of minor cases compared to Calgary. This was a traditional pattern for Edmonton prior to the YOA, and there is a tendency for system characteristics to persist. Similarly, Vancouver has screened cases from court for many years, but it is not obvious how it was done. The recent use of

the category "juveniles not charged" may provide a tool for monitoring this activity. Victoria, on the other hand, may make changes that will reflect more screening of minor cases. It may be a while before one can standardize some of these measures, but eventually neighbouring systems may be able to make intelligent comparisons using these data.

The value of this exercise is primarily in its utility for providing the police and others with some way of assessing future strategies. Our biases are rather obvious. We feel that these 5 Western cities record more crime than some Eastern cities. Thus, we should not panic when newspapers play their annual game, nor should we assume that a clearance rate of over 50% proves that the Peel police force to the west of Toronto is a superior police force. Furthermore, we feel that our Western cities process more minor cases than necessary, burdening the downstream components of the system unnecessarily. If alternative measures are successful, and if the justice net is not expanded, we should see a drop in the processing indices in the future.

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